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School Committee Minutes 11-13-2001

ARLINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE

REGULAR MEETING

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2001

STRATTON SCHOOL

7:30 PM

*Present: Joani LaMachia, Chair
David McKenna, Vice Chair
Denis Sullivan, Secretary
Barbara Goodman* *Suzanne Owayda
Paul Schlichtman
Martin Thrope*

*Supt. Kay Donovan
CFO David Kale
Asst. Supt. Joanne Gurry
Dir. Sp. Ed. Marilyn Bisbicos*

Call to order: 7:40 PM

Confirmation Voted on Meeting Site

On a motion by Mr. Sullivan and seconded by Mr. Thrope it was

Voted to confirm the vote to hold the regular school committee meeting of November 13, 2001 at the Stratton School. Unanimous

Public Participation

Nora Mann-spoke relative to the Arlington Advocate news piece on MCAS scores.

Lori Rogers-voiced concern for a proposed change in the kindergarten age, she does not support a change of the December 31st cut-off date.

Steve Gilligan-Chairman of the Patriot Council district and a member of the executive board of the Boy Scouts of America Boston Minutemen Council urged the School Committee to continue their support chartering the Boy Scouts at Arlington Public Schools.

Grant Henley, cub master of pack 388 requesting continued support and chartering of Boy Scouts of America at the Stratton and Bishop Schools.

Discussion on Chartering Boys Scouts in APS

Chair Joani LaMachia stated that first and foremost Arlington Public Schools support and appreciate the good work the boy's scouts do and welcomes them to our schools. The issue at hand is whether or not Arlington is in compliance and in alignment with the Department of Education (DOE) regulations by chartering the BSA. Ms. LaMachia has been in contact with the DOE legal counsel and the schools' counsel relative to the issue of DOE compliance. Tonight's meeting will focus on a discussion of our appropriate role in relation to the DOE regulations and the potential impact of chartering in our schools.

Ms. Goodman's original motion (seconded by Mr. Schlichtman)

Moved that based on legal advice from the Department of Education, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, and the APS legal counsel that APS will not renew the charter of the Boy Scouts of America effective January 2003.

Ms. Goodman spoke to the motion stating that she does not like making the motion; she believes that the Boys Scouts are a wonderful organization but a public school cannot charter an organization that discriminates. Ms. Goodman explained that her motion was based on the fact that although the local council adopted a nondiscrimination policy., conversations with the national and regional offices (of the Boy Scouts) were adamant that local groups have no authority over their local policies. She made several requests for clarification in writing without success.

Ms. Owayda expressed difficulty supporting the motion. Although the local council does have a policy on non-discrimination based on sexual orientation, Ms. Owayda stated that she does not believe it is fair to be punitive to the local group who is trying to work within the organization to change. She does have an issue with the charter listing Alan Brown as the executive officer, she feels that this may open APS to some kind of legal exposure.

Ms. Owayda's Motion

Offered a substitute motion of no action pending opinion from our legal counsel on chartering, sponsoring, and any other insurance issues.

Ms. LaMachia spoke to the legal council at the DOE; their advisement was that chartering was akin to sponsorship and their legal opinion was that school sponsorship was in violation of 603 CMR, 2606. School Counsel Alan Miller, indicated that because the BSA national charter fosters discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, the prudent act is for the public schools not to charter due to potential liability.

Mr. Thrope asked what the function of chartering is and requested clarification of the issues surrounding the liability of chartering. BSA assumes all liability including indemnifying the APS if legal action is pursued. Mr. Thrope continued by stating that we have to either believe or not believe what the local council states is their practice.

Mr. Sullivan offered a friendly amendment to Ms. Goodman's motion:

APS will charter the Boy Scouts for one more year and will work with the chartering organizations to find a new charter as of January 2003; also that no school official such as a principal be named as executive officer.

Mr. Schlichtman informed the School Committee that based on his research that school systems should not be the chartering organizations.

His concern is that the chartering agreement certifies that all registered adults agree to abide by the scout oath, the scout law, the declaration of religious principle the policy of non- discrimination It goes beyond the scope of what the school department should be doing.

Mr. Thrope made the **Motion** to postpone a vote on chartering the boy scouts for 2 months since we are waiting for a written legal opinion, need more information, and it would also give the boys scouts more time to explore their options.

Mr. McKenna made the motion (second by Ms. Owayda) to table the Boy Scout Vote. 3 yes 4 no motion fails. Mr. McKenna, Ms. Owayda & Mr. Thrope voted yes; Mr. Sullivan, Ms. Goodman, Mr. Schlichtman & Ms. LaMachia voted no.

Mr. Thrope's Motion with a second by Ms. Owayda

Moved to postpone a vote on chartering the boy scouts for 30 days (until 12/13/01). 3-4 Motion fails, Roll Call (Mr. McKenna, Ms. Owayda, Mr. Thrope voted yes), (Mr. Sullivan, Ms. Goodman, Mr. Schlichtman and Ms. LaMachia voted no)

Ms. Goodman's original motion with Mr. Sullivan's amendment:

Voted - based on legal advice from the Department of Education, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees and legal counsel for APS, that the APS will charter the boy scouts paks(at the Stratton & Bishop Schools) through December 31, 2002; we require that no school official be listed as an executive officer of the charter and we work with/facilitate with the Boy Scout troops to find an alternative chartering organization effective January 2003. 4-yes 3 no motion carries. Mr. Sullivan, Ms. Goodman, Mr. Schlichtman & Ms. LaMachia voted yes; Mr. Thrope, Ms. Owayda & Mr. McKenna voted no.

Supt. Donovan introduced Steven Mazzola as the new Technical Director of Arlington Public Schools

Recognition of Stratton School

Chair Joani LaMachia stated that holding the School Committee meeting at the Stratton School is a way to recognize the Stratton School for hosting many students during rebuilding and renovating over the past four years. The Stratton community, teachers, staff, parents, and students have been generous with their hospitality in making each school feel comfortable and welcome. In acknowledgement and appreciation the Stratton School was presented with a poster maker machine.

Kindergarten Entrance Age

Mrs. Donovan reported that Arlington is reviewing its kindergarten entrance age. Currently students must reach their fifth birthday by December 31st to be eligible to attend kindergarten. In a report by the APS Kindergarten Entry Age Subcommittee it noted that 200 districts in Massachusetts have a cut-off date of September 1st , 40 districts with a December 31st cut-off and the remaining 13 districts with dates somewhere between October 1st and November 1st cut-off dates. Alan Brown, a member of the subcommittee pointed out that in any given kindergarten class there can be a range of students from age 4.9 to 6 years and the range of developmental issues and milestones is enormous. The subcommittee recommended a phased in approach over two years; September 2002 would give parents of children whose birthday fall after September 1st the option of sending their child to kindergarten, and as of September 2003 students must be five by August 31st.

The Supt. asked the committee whether they would want to phase in the change or implement it all at once. Mrs. Donovan did note that in a letter from the Arlington Early Childhood Association it was unanimously voted to change the cut-off date to September 1, 2002.

The Committee discussed the advantages/disadvantages of the gradual versus the immediate change of a kindergarten date including how changing the date would impact the enrollment figures. Mr. Schlichtman indicated that he would be in favor of a phased in approach with the possibility of a one-month waiver. Supt. Donovan explained that the next step is to hold a town wide meeting in early December for parents who would be effected, then come back to the School Committee with a request to refer the issue to the policy & procedures subcommittee.

Recess

Secretary's Report

Mr. Sullivan reviewed correspondence.

On a motion by Mr. Sullivan and seconded by Mr. Thrope it was unanimously

Voted to approve the regular meeting minutes of September 25, 2001.

Superintendent's Report

“ **MCAS Report** – Assistant Superintendent, Joanne Gurry acknowledged the efforts of teachers on the improved MCAS scores. Dr. Gurry reported the results of the 2001 MCAS in a power point presentation.

“ **Professional Development** - Dr. Gurry summarized the different programs held for teachers and staff during the professional development day held on October 29th

“ **Personnel/Minority Hiring Report** – Supt. Donovan reported that there are currently 23 professional staff members who are minorities

7 hired for the current year. Ms. Goodman requested a report on how we recruit, how many minorities applied, how many were interviewed, and how many were accepted. Kay will have Gus Martinson speak to the Committee at the next meeting.

“ **Enrollments/Class Size** – Supt. Donovan reviewed class size. At the elementary school the average class size is 18.9. At the Ottoson Middle School there are 12 classes over 25, consisting mostly physical education, computer classes, drama & chorus. At AHS because of the realignment of the automotive classes there are 6 classes of 30 or 31 students, 47 classes of 26-29 students and 153 classes of less than 20 students.

“ **Update on Goals Subcommittee** – Mrs. Donovan asked for two members to serve on the goals subcommittee; the meetings will meet Wednesdays from 7:00 – 9:00 PM. Suzanne Owayda and Paul Schlichtman offered to represent the school committee.

“ **Elementary School Recess** – All principals report that every class is offering 10-15 minutes of recess on days that there are no physical education classes in grades K-5 (beyond lunch & physical education).

Subcommittee Report

“ **Specialized Student Services** – Mr. McKenna reported that the subcommittee met on October 16th and learned that the new scoreboard is scheduled to be up and running in time for the Thanksgiving football game. The committee heard a report from Special Education Director Marilyn Bisbicos, on the current concerns affecting the special education programs and the emerging special education issues in Arlington and in the State.

Report on MASC Annual Delegate Meeting

Ms. Goodman, Ms. Owayda, and Mr. Schlichtman attended the MASC/MASS annual delegate meeting. Both of Arlington’s resolutions passed at the meeting, resolution #1 School Building Assistant and resolution # 2 Chapter 70 Funding. Former member Bill Carey was awarded the MASC Lifetime Achievement Award and Ms. Goodman was named to the All State School Committee. Ms. Owayda attended sessions on legal issues, public meeting and MGL chapter 268A section 23. Ms. Owayda requested that as a future agenda item the Committee invite Town Counsel John Maher to speak to the issues surrounding Chapter 268A section 23.

PTBC Update

On a motion by Mr. Thrope and seconded by Ms. Goodman

Voted that the Arlington School Committee accepts the renovated Bishop School as complete. Unanimous

Mr. Thrope reported that the PTBC has concerns about moving ahead with the Dallin in a timely manner. The PTBC requested that Mr. Thrope (as School Committee representative to the PTBC) ask the School Committee for a directive on the population of the Dallin School and the remaining three schools. Factors to be considered include the potential impact of building at St. Camillus, take a look at the location of the BIP program. The goal is to meet the Brackett standard all the way through the Stratton School. Mr. Thrope volunteered to work in putting together a report.

Supt. Donovan pointed out that there is currently 380 students enrolled at the Dallin School, the size of the school has already been voted and plans have been drawn with the 380 student figure.

On a motion by Mr. McKenna and seconded it was unanimously voted to move the 11:00 rule for 15 minutes.

New Business

“ The Spanish Fiesta held at the Stratton School on Saturday was a great success with 1200-1300 in attendance.

“ The Budget Revenue Task Force will meet on Monday, November 19th .

“ A letter received from the Commissioner of Education warned not to expect any budget increases for next year and that a delay in implementing the new Special Education reimbursement rate is likely.

“ Dress etiquette day at the Brackett School is Friday, November 16th

The School Committee thanked the volunteers of the cable company for recording tonight’s meeting at the Stratton School.

On a motion by Mr. Sullivan and seconded Mr. McKenna

“ Voted to adjourn the meeting a 11:15 PM